

## SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

## Matthew 11:28-30

## CHRIST CARRIES THE LOAD FOR YOU

*Come unto Me, all ye [you] that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye [you] shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.*

500-plus years ago, in the 1500's, a professor at the university in Wittenberg, Germany, was growing by leaps and bounds in his subject area—the Bible. (A teacher always learns more preparing for classes than the students do in hearing and digesting them.) The professor was Dr. Martin Luther. (Not be confused with Dr. Martin Luther King of the United States from a mere 60 years ago). Professor Martin Luther was deeply troubled by his sins before Almighty God. He had been a law student at another university until 1505, when he dropped out and became a Roman Catholic monk. He had been taught, and he so believed, that if he became a monk, and was devoted to service to the Lord, he would find peace and forgiveness. Two years later he further became a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. Still no peace. In 1509 he was sent by the monastery to teach philosophy at the University of Wittenberg. A monk and priest, he also was asked to teach classes on the Bible. Thus he pursued his personal education in Scripture as well. Three years later, in 1512, he was given the degree of "Doctor of Theology." Internal peace, spiritual peace, peace with God, still eluded him. Sometime in 1514 or 1515 as he was preparing for classes, he struggled with the passage *For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes . . . For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written—The just shall live by faith (Romans 1:16-17)*. How could the "righteousness of God" bring life and salvation? He had always understood "the righteousness of God" to be the dreaded justice and righteousness of God doled out upon unworthy sinners—like himself. But he finally grasped that the "righteousness of God" spoken of in this passage is the righteousness that God gives to sinners and credits to them because Christ took sin's punishment and died, rising in victory. The righteous of God in Christ is not punishment, but it is His undeserved gift of mercy, love, and forgiveness. It is ours by faith. At this point, Dr. Luther understood the sweet Good News that *God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16)*. Peace at last for Martin Luther in Jesus!

This peace became the driving force in his labors as Professor and Doctor of Theology. He was becoming increasingly disturbed by all the things in the church of his day, the Roman Catholic Church, which were taught contrary to righteousness in Jesus. In 1517, the buying and selling of "indulgences" was being heavily promoted. It did not sit well with him. Indulgences were certificates of paper that could be purchased from the church to reduce a Christian's punishment for sin in the so-called place of purgatory. On October 31, 1517—504 years ago today--Dr. Martin Luther wrote 95 Theses-- 95 Statements—against indulgences and nailed his statements onto the church door in Wittenberg, the public bulletin board of the day. This action is used by historians to mark the beginning of the Lutheran Reform, Reform-ation, of the church in the 1500's. The Lord used Dr. Luther to bring back to light the truth of salvation and forgiveness by faith in Christ alone. Thus we rejoice and share in that heritage to this day and on this day.

Our text describes well what God did 500 years ago, bringing peace in Jesus--to Martin Luther and to others. The words prior to our text are words from Jesus, castigating the Jewish cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. They thought they were so smart and so good that they didn't need to acknowledge any sins or seek God's promised mercy and forgiveness in His Son. Jesus said punishment awaited. However, forgiveness and eternal life were being revealed to those who were but little babes in heart and thought. To their hearts God the Son revealed the Father's love and forgiveness.

To these burdened, conscience-stricken hearts, to those weighed down by guilt, and to Martin Luther 500 years ago and to you today, Jesus says, *Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*. He's not simply talking about the wear and tear of another day's work and another day of life. (Do you feel beat and pounded down at the end of the day?) He's talking about being beat and pounded spiritually. Without Jesus, that's your status. If you don't think so, you're only fooling yourself. Have you loved and respected your heavenly Father at all times? Does His name or His Son's name cross your lips in cursing and swearing? Have you always loved and respected your father and mother? Have you always loved and respected your husband, ladies? Men, have you always loved and treasured your wife? Have you loved your children? always? Excuses abound—"Well in my case it's different--you see my dad, etc." No good. Now fix it. By yourself can you fix your status? Try harder. That's like telling someone with astigmatism or cataracts to try harder to see the words. It never works. It can't. You are weary, beat, and *heavy laden*, loaded down like a cargo ship with its draught deep in the water.

Jesus says to you in His Word, as He said to Martin Luther, as he says to sinners everywhere *I will give you rest!* In Jesus the load is gone and off your back. You're a ship light on the water. You are forgiven. That's the heart and core of the Reformation message! *I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes . . . For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written—The just shall live by faith (Romans 1:16-17).* God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16). "I will give you rest." It's break-time like break-time at work, but it lasts without end. Think of putting the game or the movie on "pause." Actually, it's really not you that "pauses," but it's the machine that gets a break. "I will give you REST." Peace with God in heaven, refreshing breezes of love, delightful water of life. All in Jesus.

*Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* Jesus says, "Put on my yoke, it's not a burden." But our sinful flesh thinks, "Oh, sure, now I have to toe the line with all this religious stuff. I can't have any fun anymore." Wrong. It's not a ball and chain, it's your freedom and ease! Why? Because He was meek and lowly for your sake. *He made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:7-8).* Christ stooped to take sin's load for you. Now you "find" rest for your souls. What a joy to "find" something! Have you ever heard the expression "Eureka!" meaning "I have found it"? This is a different form of the same Greek word. Jesus says, "You will find" a treasure indeed--rest for your souls! Not a burden, *For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.*

There's a deeper picture here, than first meets the eye. Do not think of the words "Take My yoke upon you," as a horse having a harness put on him so that he can pull the plow or the cart. A "yoke" by definition is a means of joining two—as in a yoke of oxen. Think of two oxen yoked together with a wooden bar and neck enclosures pulling a plow, etc. When you put on Jesus' yoke, it's light and easy, because you are now yoked with HIM! Imagine pulling a plow or a wagon with Jesus as your partner! Why, He does all the work! He's the Almighty Son of God. You're just along for the stroll. Jesus has pulled your load of sin for you. He has settled your account, your very much due account, with God the Father! In Him, peace for you. Peace for Martin Luther. You are no longer enslaved by demands from anyone, church or otherwise, to get yourself to heaven. You are safe.

The sane Lord will bless you and watch over you in this life. That's a significant point. In our Christian lives, as a congregation, as a synod, as individuals, and in our physical life at work, on the ranch, in the world, stop thinking it all depends on you. Or in reverse, stop thinking it's all your fault, when things fail. *Come to me and I will give you rest.* You are in my hands—safe and secure. You are yoked with me. I grant success when the time is right. I wonder how Martin Luther felt ten years after October 31, 1517. In 1527 was everything going great? The papacy in Rome hadn't changed. The people who were free in Christ were not all that quick to learn. They were free from their bondage to getting themselves into God's good graces, but they were slow to learn as God's children in Christ to love Him back and willingly serve Him, striving to keep His commandments. Fathers were slow to catch on. Luther wrote the Small Catechism for them. Clergymen were slow to catch on. Luther wrote the Large Catechism for them. Faulty co-workers like Karlstadt were surely a disappointment to him. The Peasants Revolt in which peasants took force against their masters was distasteful to him. Can you hear Jesus say to Martin Luther, *Come to Me and I will give you rest.*

Do you think the original fathers of the CLC 60 years ago were disappointed after 10 or 20 years, when there had not been a mass exodus from the Wisconsin Synod? Is it discouraging now to our congregations and to our pastors, that our churches are not bursting at the seams? In a different vein, is there a temptation to think, "After all I've done, they'll surely remember me; I'm the one that keeps this place afloat" and then when it's not so "It's all my fault. I'm a failure." Jesus says, *Come to Me for Rest.* Trust Me, not yourself, not your iron-clad "religion," not your sacrifices of the past and present. Trust me and serve Me with willing and joyful hearts. I am carrying and have carried the load!

In II Corinthians Paul writes. *For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body (II Corinthians 4:5-10).* In Jesus there is Rest.

With Martin Luther: we say: "A mighty fortress is our God, a trusty shield and weapon. . . . with might of ours can naught be done . . . for us fights the valiant one . . . Jesus Christ it is, He holds the (battle) field forever . . . take they our life, goods, fame child, and wife—let these all be gone. They yet have nothing won. The Kingdom ours remaineth!"

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---